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To the Town of Arlington, Massachusetts:

I am a resident of Arlington (151 Highland Avenue) and a professor of political science at Boston University. I study American politics, particularly race, class, and policing, which is of direct relevance to the issue I write about today.

I strongly oppose a proposed Article 14 to illegalize picketing “in front of or about” a specific residence in Arlington.

As I write, the conditions of acceptable protest are narrowing across the nation. In some places it is illegal to write “Black Lives Matter” on the sidewalk. A series of states have illegalized oil pipeline protests in recent years, after the historic resistance at Standing Rock.

In other localities, all protests have been *de facto* banned, as all protests require permits and local government refused to grant any permits.

Here in the greater Boston area, student protests that do not go through a labyrinthian set of processes and procedures to request permission are considered property crimes – trespassing. Local police have brutalized student protestors sitting peacefully in tents.

This proposal would do more of the same. Restrictions on protest are restrictions on democracy.

The proposal is also vaguely worded. How would tenants getting evicted by a slumlord protest their landlord, if they lived on the same property as the landlord?

Nearly all protest takes place near a residence. The opportunities for this proposal to be weaponized are immense.

The fact that Arlington police approve of the proposal should be a warning sign. They may well support it because it expands their power to regulate people. It was not all too long ago that Arlington residents protested the police killing of George Floyd in our city’s streets. If this proposal

had been passed prior to 2020, what guarantee do we have that it would not have been used against the protestors?

Please feel free to contact me with any questions at (317) 670-7594.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Spencer Piston". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Spencer Piston

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